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SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: BOLIVIA: UNASUR DECISION BOLSTERS EVO

Classified By: Acting EcoPol Chief Brian Quigley for reasons 1.4 b,d

¶1. (SBU) President Evo Morales applauded the UNASUR (group of South American presidents) decision in his September 16 press conference, thanking UNASUR for its "full support" and using the UNASUR declaration to lash out at the opposition. "I hope that the opposition authorities respect UNASUR" Morales said, adding that "if the prefects had listened to our calls for dialogue, there would have been no deaths." In his press conference in Bolivia, Morales made no mention of the United States, despite his and Venezuelan President Chavez's accusations of U.S. "conspiracy" in Santiago.

¶2. (C) Our contacts in the diplomatic community have generally welcomed the UNASUR announcement. The Ecuadorian Charge says that as this is the first big challenge faced by UNASUR it is very important to the members that they be successful in efforts to support Morales' government in finding a peaceful solution. The Ecuadoreans added that the makeup and role of the UNASUR commission (to Bolivia) will depend on the outcome of Morales' talks with Tarija Prefect Mario Cossio, but she emphasized the commission's involvement would be political and not/not military.

¶3. (C) The Paraguayan Charge said that all UNASUR countries, including Paraguay, had agreed to support the democratically-elected government of Evo Morales, deplore the violence in Pando, and to work together to stabilize and pacify the situation. Paraguay will participate in the commission, which Paraguay understood to consist of only governmental (not military) personnel. She understands the role of the commission as mostly assisting in the mediation between Morales and the opposition departments. She believed that OAS Secretary General Insulza was due to arrive in Bolivia on September 16.

¶4. (C) The British Ambassador told us he met with EU Ambassadors the morning of September 16. During the meeting they concluded that it was inevitable that UNASUR declare in favor of the government, but some participants noted that it was not helpful that there was no official recognition of the other side of the story, the opposition, which will damage any UNASUR efforts to facilitate a peaceful end. The EU

Ambassadors also noted that a declaration is only a first step, and that there are no structures in place within UNASUR to move forward. The Europeans felt that Morales "got the declaration he wanted" but that this may encourage the government to continue its hard-line stance and ignore dialogue. Reportedly during the UNASUR meeting Brazilian President Lula was insistent that the Bolivian government must meet with the opposition to find a peaceful solution. The British are not doubtful about the possible success of dialogue, pointing to the recent arrest of Pando Prefect Fernandez as a government provocation. On the positive side, the British noted that so far government-aligned social groups have not besieged the congress.

15. (C) Diplomats from non-member countries are generally hailing the UNASUR announcement as optimistic. The Canadian Consul in La Paz said he was heartened by the fact that the "moderates" prevailed, despite rhetoric from Venezuelan President Chavez, and that the commission will focus on investigation and facilitating dialogue. The Chinese Embassy, while emphasizing that there is no official Chinese statement yet, said they view the UNASUR decision as a chance to "improve the situation". Other missions seem to be in a wait-and-see stance.

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